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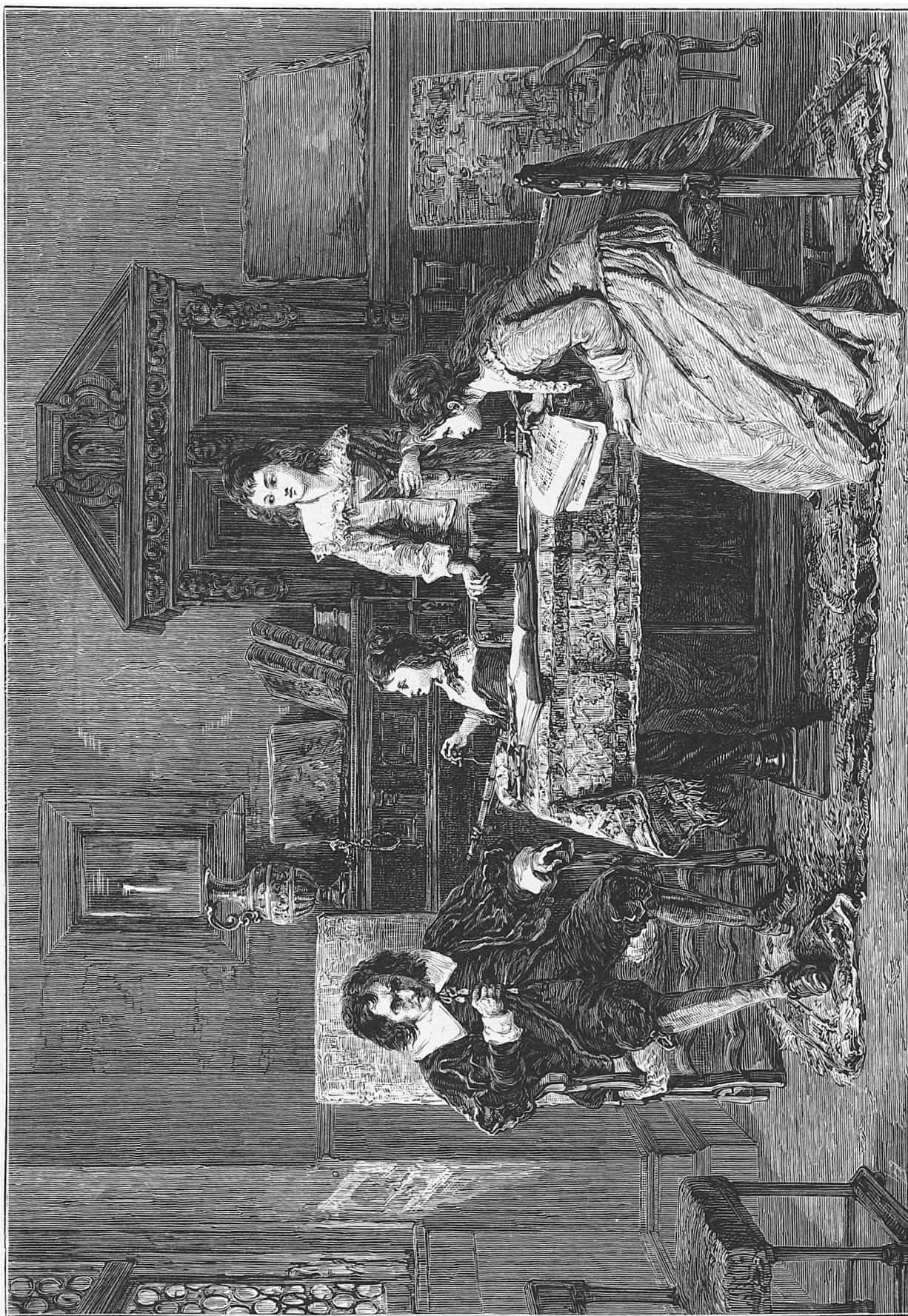
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MILTON DICTATING PARADISE LOST TO HIS DAUGHTER.

From a Painting by MICHEL MUNKACSVY.

MICHAEL MUNKACSY.



THE most romantic and rapidly-achieved artistic success of recent times is that of MICHAEL MUNKACSY, the Hungarian painter, who was born at Muncacs, on the 10th of October, 1846, and is now living in a fine hôtel built by himself near Meissonier's house in Paris. Soon after his birth his mother died, and while he was still a boy his father, a state functionary in Hungary, was imprisoned for political reasons, and died in jail, leaving behind him in poverty a family of six young children. A rich aunt befriended Michael, adopted him, and greatly endeared herself to him. But in a short time this source of affection and protection was destroyed. A band of marauders, taking advantage of the unsettled condition of things in that country, surrounded the house of the kind-hearted woman, burned it to the ground, and murdered her. The lad was again an orphan. His uncle, a lawyer, whose property had been confiscated by the Government, offered him a home, but apprenticed him to a carpenter in Csaba, Hungary. Manual labor was the order of the day, and study the order of the night. When Munkacsy had learned his trade, he was able to earn about a dollar and a quarter a week by working daily from five o'clock in the morning until sundown. But he had the soul of his father, says a French biographer (to whom we are indebted for these biographical incidents), and believed in the maxim, *Dant vulnera vitam*. He kept faith with himself and his future, and obtained all the instruction he could from the students of the college at Arad, in Hungary, where he was pursuing his humble avocation. He wrote verse occasionally, but did not think of becoming a painter. His exertions exceeded his strength, which was constantly diminishing for lack of proper food. The destruction of the poor is their poverty. An intermittent fever seized him, and in 1861 his uncle, whose financial condition had improved, took him back to his old home at Gyula. Here Munkacsy found a portrait-painter of moderate talents, Shamosy by name. During his convalescence he visited Shamosy often, and when he was ready to return to Arad, the portrait-painter went with him. There was a tide in Munkacsy's affairs; he took it at its flood and was borne to fortune. He began to paint. His first price for a picture was a dinner. Next he agreed to commit to canvas the features and forms of the parents of a neighbouring tailor, in return for an overcoat. For two years he continued his operations after this style, receiving from Shamosy instruction in his art and also a general education. He left Arad, went to his uncle's, made studies from Nature, and journeyed to Pesth, where the Society for the Assistance of Artists gave him forty dollars for a picture of an interior with peasants. His next work fetched sixty-five dollars, and he set off for Vienna and its galleries. In 1866 he returned to Pesth, was seized with an affection of the eyes, and for six months pined in a hospital. Then he went to Munich with ten dollars in his pocket, and studied there two years. "One day," says his biographer, "he comprehended that nothing is so good as Nature." Then he left Munich for Düsseldorf, and changed entirely his manner of painting. His first painting was execrable—he says so himself. His second was passable, and his third was 'The Condemned to Death.' His friends urged him to take this last work to Paris. "How can I?" he replied; "only *chefs-d'œuvre* are for the *Salon*." "Never mind that," they urged; "go ahead." He went ahead, and his 'Condemned to Death' became a sensation in the Exhibition of 1870. Paris has since been his home. In 1873 he painted his 'Episode in the Hungarian War'; in 1874, his 'Mont-de-Piété,' and 'Night Rovers'; in 1875, his 'Village Hero'; and in 1876, his 'Interior of a Studio,' with a portrait of himself, and of his charming wife, the widow of the Baron de Marches.

To these biographical incidents from the French writer mentioned above—M. René Delorme, in the "*Chefs-d'Œuvre d'Art à l'Exposition Universelle, 1878*"—must be added some interesting personal reminiscences contributed to the February number of *Lippincott's Magazine*, by Mr. John R. Tait, of Baltimore, a fellow-student of Munkacsy's at Düsseldorf. In the autumn of 1868, when Munkacsy, poor and unknown, made his appearance in that

academic city of the Rhine, he is described as being of medium height and of good figure, with "pleasant face, light beard, and crisp moustache. His dreamy, melancholy eyes looked out from under bent brows, and his massive forehead was covered with thick, curly locks of brown hair prematurely streaked with grey. Handsome or not, his appearance was striking, and was emphasised still more by a slight singularity of his dress, which included a sort of dolman and top-boots, and was a half compromise with the national costume of Hungary. He resembled strikingly portraits of Beethoven." He soon became a general favourite not only with the artists but with the ladies. He could ride horseback like a trooper, he could play tricks like a necromancer, he was an excellent amateur actor, he understood music, and "he whistled as Patti sings. With his features in perfect repose, like a marble faun's, and the handsome lines of his mouth scarcely contracted in the least, he gave utterance to the most strangely-beautiful notes—ripples of silvery sound that a nightingale might envy or a mocking-bird break its heart in trying to imitate. Mournful Hungarian melodies came from his lips plaintive as a sigh, rising and falling in improvised variations, and then bursting into a clear, liquid warble like that of a bird." He could tell a story with the readiness and "point" of a sailor in the fore-castle. He sat up all night at students' revels, but neither smoked nor drank. He always dressed neatly and sprucely. When money began to pour into his coffers, he was generous to a fault, and lived up to his income. He gave memorable dinner-parties, providing for his guests the choicest vintages of his native land, but drinking water himself.

The first time that he went to Paris was in 1870 on the occasion of the exhibition of his 'Condemned to Death,' catalogued at the *Salon* as 'Le dernier Jour d'un Condamné.' This picture was painted in 1869 for an American gentleman who ordered it when Munkacsy was almost unknown outside of Düsseldorf, agreeing to pay a price then considered large, but now far below its worth. It is in Mr. Gibson's gallery in Philadelphia. It illustrates the Hungarian custom of allowing the people to visit in his cell and inspect a man condemned to death, on the day before his execution. In this instance the man is surrounded by his wife and children as well as by many of the populace, so that the theme affords a fine opportunity for the display of various types of character. Munkacsy gained the gold medal for it, and at once became famous. Several works of his have been exhibited at different times in the Goupil Gallery in New York; but it is universally agreed that the 'Blind Milton dictating "Paradise Lost" to his Daughters' is his best picture, showing him to marvellous advantage in his treatment of sunlight and the subtleties of personal character.

This work which, as we write, is on exhibition in London, after receiving a medal of honour at the late Paris Exhibition, we have not seen, our engraving of it being made from a photograph in the possession of Mr. Samuel P. Avery, who negotiated the sale of the painting to Mr. Robert Lenox Kennedy when the latter gentleman bought it for presentation to the Lenox Library in New York City. Its arrival in this country will be an Art event of no little moment. Meanwhile it is interesting to know how enthusiastically the leading French critics have recorded its praises, and how unanimous has been their verdict on its (we had almost said) unparalleled excellences. One of them, M. Emile Bergerat, in the *Paris Journal Officiel*, describes it as "one of the best pieces of painting that Paris has seen these twenty years. A number of experts are inclined to regard it as one of the marvels of the Universal Exhibition of 1878. It is," he continues, "very simple and perfectly studied for effect, the composition filling fully, and without gaps, the rectangle of the canvas (which is about eight feet long and six feet high). It is one and yet many, as the poetic arts, from Aristotle to Boileau, demanded. The deep and silent drama is developed in all the faces clearly enough to place it within the apprehension of the general spectator; the characters are true, living, and real even to illusion. I have sought the faults of the work, but I cannot find them. Must we conclude, then, that M. Munkacsy has reached this result solely by the force of the consummate executant, and by the science of his craft? Not at all. Between this

picture and his former ones the distance is enormous and almost immeasurable. All at once, and without doing anything to foretoken such an event, he has emerged a poet under the guise of a painter. The thought of the artist was haunted by a powerful vision like some sudden apparition of the past, and as Munkacsy is endowed with rare energy and resolution, he at once accepted the problem that confronted him, and set himself to solving it. The result passes all hope."

"An admirable painting it is," says M. Cochin, in *Le Français*, "and one of the most satisfactory that the Exhibition has offered. Such are the qualities of the composition that the spectator enters immediately and irresistibly into the conception of the painter. . . . Admirable composition where the painter has almost reached the height of the poet whom he has painted for us!" . . . What is the secret of Munkacsy? It is, we think, the profound art of his composition: all the elements of the conception are so arranged in his works that these present themselves as wholes, and do not permit the spectator's thought to concern itself with outside matters. This it is that makes Munkacsy a great painter. "This grand canvas," says M. Victor Cherbuliez, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*,

"is filled with emotion, with recollection, with silence." The spectator assists at the birth of 'Paradise Lost.' "Calm, silent, luminous," says M. Dubosc de Pesquidoux, in *L'Union*, "this beautiful painting, whose figures in half-tint detach themselves on a sombre ground like clouds in the ambient air, is a striking example of the power of Art, and of its aptness for measuring itself with life." "The subject," says M. Fourcaud, in the *Moniteur des Arts*, "is one of epic simplicity but particularly hard to treat. How shall be painted a man like the English poet of whom one might say that the sublime was his native land? What ideal shall be formed of this blind man who like Homer carried all heaven in his sightless eyes; of this austere Puritan who would not give instruction to his daughters for fear of corrupting their souls? How shall there be given to the scene that decorous and elevated familiarity which on the one hand shall not degenerate into triviality, nor on the other rise into excessive emphasis, but which shall truthfully depict the naïve but by no means enthusiastic admiration of these three girls? This is what the case required, and this is what Munkacsy has done. He has honoured his country and French hospitality."

ART IN THE HOUSE.



TRANSLATION of "Art in the House," by Jacob von Falke, Vice-Director of the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry at Vienna, edited with notes by Charles C. Perkins, has recently been published by Prang and Co., of Boston. It is profusely illustrated with chromolithographs, albertypes, and typographic etchings, making a volume of rare beauty and value.

Herr von Falke treats the subject of "Art in the House" both from an historical and a critical standpoint. The text consists of lectures delivered at the Austrian Museum of Art and Industry; and the first four of them treat of "The Græco-Roman House," "The Mediæval House," "The House of the Sixteenth Century," and "The Houses of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries"—of which, in the true scholarly method of a German, the author gives a most careful and interesting analysis. This set of subjects, with Mr. Perkins's introduction describing the Assyrian and the Egyptian houses and furniture, forms properly the first division of the book; while the latter half consists of chapters on style and harmony, flooring and walls, wall ornaments and ceilings, furniture, the decoration of the table; and the book ends with a chapter devoted to "Women's Æsthetic Mission."

The first half is the most novel and interesting, for it treats in a familiar way of many points that are usually only known to the architect or the archæologist. Here we find the Pompeian house reconstructed in its forms, its colours, its furniture, and its art. Woodcuts of the household utensils, engravings of the wall-decoration, and an elaborate full-page chromo of the 'Interior of Salust's House at Pompeii,' give a vivid *résumé* of the life and domestic conditions of that period. We see the beautiful frescoes, the elaborate mosaics, and the tables, the couches, and the chairs, of a Pompeian dwelling all vividly portrayed. Going on to the next chapter, the reader is transferred to Italian palaces and German castles, and Von Falke has told how the "antique house made us acquainted with a peculiar but very perfect kind of dwelling, such as could only have been obtained by a highly-endowed people." He goes on to explain that in the Middle Ages after an "ever-renewed flood of barbarian invasion," though "the mediæval mansion left much to be desired both in the way of Art and comfort, it was the starting-point of our present system, and was suited to the same ideas of family life which we now have." As window-glass was of comparatively recent introduction, a vivid picture is drawn of the cold dwellings of the north, with the fire built on a hearth in the centre of the hall, which formed the chief room of the mansion, the smoke escaping as it could, while in the unglazed openings of the windows, parchment, oil-paper, and shutters, were inserted to keep out the wind. We picture to our

minds these knightly halls and the charming private apartments of the ladies, as we see them now in restored castles or castellated dwellings, with their deep bay-windows filled with painted glass, through which a poetical, coloured, twilight-like, and subdued light penetrated into the apartment. "But the fact is that such halls and chambers were very exceptionally to be met with"—that is to say, they were rare up to the beginning of modern times.

To illustrate and describe these buildings, charming, mellow-tinted engravings are given of old bedrooms with their high beds and "testers," with big, deep, carved chimney-pieces, and carved oaken chests, and heavy tapestry hangings—which latter are sometimes shown as mere effects in the rooms, and on other pages of the book are almost minute enough to be used as patterns for embroidery. These are all characteristic of some period, or are designed to express the influence, it may be, of Oriental manufactures, or perhaps they show the industry of some "Lady of Shallott."

These descriptions of so many different kinds of dwellings and their furnishing afford admirable illustrations of the principles that should or should not govern all household arrangements; and we learn in the remaining chapters of the book what constitutes the charm of Oriental divans as they supply one set of our needs, and for what reason "human comfort and ease have now to be considered, and it would really seem as if the *rococo* forms were best adapted to satisfy their demands," as every attempt "by stoically ignoring the feebleness of human bodies will result in failure." The author defends the "curved back, whose upholstery is admirably adapted to fit dorsal lines and accommodate dorsal weakness. . . . We must therefore make this need a factor in our calculations, and endeavour to construct our seats as correctly as possible, without imitating the incongruities and absurdities of the *rococo* on one hand, or renouncing ease and comfort on the other." Von Falke, from Egyptian examples of chairs, tells us how we may have seats with straight backs that would suit the present ideas of an angular structure combined with the soft lines of the *rococo*, by gradually diminishing the thickness of the cushion on the back of our chairs from the seat to the top. A great many such hints as this one are given in the book; and, though a tinge of the German taste of the present time clings to the author, and is not in accordance with the English and Eastlake standard, the book is full of suggestive and true thought on these subjects, which cannot fail to educate and enlarge the mind of the reader in a sensible and legitimate direction. The facts about old houses and furniture stimulate the mind as to their origin in the needs of the nations where they existed, and Von Falke's own enlightened criticism guides the ignorant how to separate mere fashion from the great principles that ought to govern the arrangement of our homes. S. N. C.